



MOTIVES FOR BOOSTING CULTURAL TOURISM IN ŠTIP: OTTOMAN HERITAGE

Biljana Petrevska

Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, University Goce Delcev - Štip, Macedonia

biljana.petrevska@ugd.edu.mk

Abstract

The study investigates the main prevailing factors for reanimating heritage sites dating from Ottoman period. This is done by elaborating the case of Štip (Macedonia), where five sites are identified as an Ottoman heritage. Generally, it was concluded that currently, the investigated sites are in an inadequate appearance, so only scarce tourism valorization can be done. On the other hand, they all possess uniqueness, esthetic, architectural, historic and educational value, and may be related to many legends, myths and stories, thus been completely suitable to be presented as tourism products and part of a tourist route. Finally, the study recommends design and development of an Ottoman heritage tourism product, but not as a separate product of Štip, but rather as a regional, or even national product, which may be promoted in a tailor-made tourist route.

Key words:

Cultural tourism; Ottoman heritage; Tourism product; Promotion.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism supported by heritage sites, is one of the leading motives in tourism industry resulting in development of specific tourism products. The heritage sites are often destined to be leading or supporting spots on the tourism course generally being designed for specific groups of tourists and visitors. While the prevailing motives may be led by supply (Richards, 1996) or demand side (Richards & Fernandes, 2007), this paper treats only the supply side being lead by the need to better clarify the supply side of the heritage tourism. Moreover, the study evaluates the possibility for reanimating the Ottoman heritage sites (OHS) by assessing the influence of several factors in the line of tourism valorization.

There is no current work in Macedonia that pays attention to such comprehensive approach like this research explores. Besides its contribution to the literature as a

pioneer study in Macedonia's academic work, the study has practical significance since it recommends design of an Ottoman heritage tourism product and a specific thematic tourist route. It praises that local and regional authorities should induce more proactive attitude among tourism policy makers, which is easily manageable if creating tourism products tailored for specific target groups.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study is based on a qualitative research method and incorporates three sources of data: interviews; modeling; and secondary sources. The interviews were conducted in December, 2016. During the interviewing, full notes were taken, upon which a qualitative data analysis was conducted to the collected information.

The interviews contained direct, clear and tailored questions that led to initial conclusions. Yet, the evidence from the field was supplemented with the modified version of a model (Krakover, 2016) which main intention is to assist in a heritage tourism formation. We have adjusted and altered the model to better fit the sampled sites. The model offers a logical order of steps summarized in two major phases: (i) Initial phase (Fig. 1); and (ii) Mature phase (Fig. 2). Both phases incorporate limited steps, so some modifications were made. The initial phase outlines several steps that are logical and were supported by the field evidence. In step 1, we have marked an existence of an Ottoman landmark, which can be a mosque, bedesten, bridge etc. Step 2 was identification of stakeholders who assessed the possibilities for reanimating these landmarks. In the final step 3, we investigated the potentials for mapping the landmarks as tourist attractions. The second phase of the model is the mature phase, which presents more advance steps in tourism product formation. In this manner, the first step consisted of the supply improvements represented as supplementary attractions related to the Ottoman culture. In step 2, we have investigated the presence of specialized tour guides, while step 3 was examination of potentials for creating an Ottoman heritage tourist route and the possibilities for their local, regional or even national valorization.

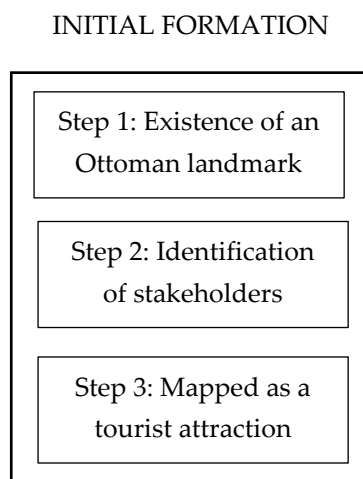


FIG. 1. INITIAL PHASE (modified and adjusted upon Krakover (2016: 8)

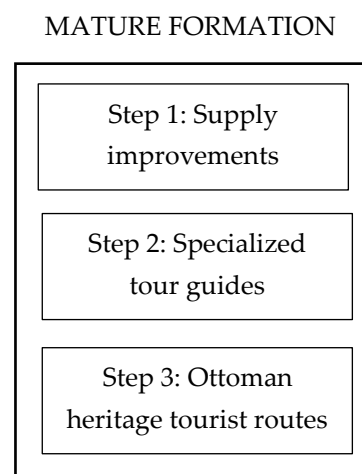


FIG. 2 MATURE PHASE (modified and adjusted upon Krakover (2016: 13)

The target group for interviewing consisted of key stakeholders from local and central level who are directly or indirectly involved in issues related to the OHS. Total of nine interviews were held with an average conversation time of 22 minutes (Table 1).

TABLE 1. SUMMARIZED RESULTS ON GENERAL INTERVIEWEE DATA

Item	Description
Position	2 Historians of Art, 4 Councilors for conservation, a Historian, a Councilor at the Municipality's cadaster, an Inspector at the Ministry of Culture
Age	between 35-87 (average: 61 years)
Sex	1 female (11%); 8 male (89%)
Time	20-35 min (average: 22 min)

The study investigated the presence of four factors (F) for enhancing cultural tourism by reanimating Ottoman landmarks in Štip: F₁ - Deliberate decision; F₂ - Revival of a Past; F₃ - Economic benefit; and F₄ - Promotion. As noted by the Center for Development of the East Planning Region of Macedonia. (2015b), five sites were identified as Ottoman heritage (Fig. 3).



FIG. 3. MAP OF ŠTIP WITH SAMPLED SITES: 1 - Sultan's bridge Emir Ćučuk, 2 - Clock Tower, 3 - Husamedin Paša Mosque, 4 - Kadin Aga Mosque, 5 - Bedesten

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The degree to which the investigated landmarks are prepared to be offered as tourism heritage sites, differs greatly. They are not concentrated in one entity, but are rather dispersed in various locations. Despite their authenticity and historic value, they are not registered as belonging to a protected area. Except for the Kadin Aga Mosque (Fig. 3, item No. 4) which is an active religious facility for the Muslims living in Štip, and the Bedesten (Fig. 3, item No. 5) which occasionally serves as an exhibition place, the rest of the OHS are passive. The local tourist guides do not include them in any of the tourist routes. Yet, there is a high awareness of the positive impacts that OHS may bring to tourism development of the city and the region.

After detailed observations during the field survey, it was concluded that Štip with its OHS is still in the initial phase, but it is rapidly going to the maturity phase. Yet, much

design work of relief, restitution, restoration, drawing, mechanical, electrical and structural strengthening should be undertaken which is strongly depended on local, regional and national funding.

After data sublimation, it was concluded that the key stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in issues related to the OHS, assessed two motives as leading for the reanimation: (i) Deliberate decision for tourism development; and (ii) Economic benefit. In the case of the deliberate decision, the intention was to investigate whether the OHS may contribute to tourism development by evoking the history. 89% agreed that investing in Ottoman sites should be initiated only if perceiving them as a cultural heritage. This supports the finding that the OHS tend to preserve and animate diverse features such as structures, history, religion and folklore, as noted in (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). The rest of the interviewees representing 11% partially agreed.

In the case of economic benefit, the intention was to investigate whether OHS are perceived to lead to economic benefits, so they may be developed as points of interest or tourist attractions. 78% stated that if the local government along with a support from the central government allocate investment funds, the sites may be renovated and reanimated. By developing OHS it is expected to gain economic benefits that may enhance local and regional development. On the other hand, 11% of the respondents stated that the current sites possess only historical values, which may not lead to economic benefits. The rest of 11% partially agreed on this issue. Namely, the interviewees responded that only the Bedesten as a facility for cultural events (exhibitions, performances, art events, poetry readings, plays etc.) may bring some economic benefits, which may not be the case with the mosques.

Due to almost identical answers, no clear conclusion can be drawn when investigating the motive for the presence of the revival of a glorious Pas. Namely, 44% replied positively stating that having heritage sites dated from 16th and 17th century revives the past when the Ottoman empire was dispersed over the Macedonian territory. Particularly the Bedesten and the Clock Tower may be used as facilities to revitalize the ancient history when people of different affiliations were living together. On the other hand, 56% replied negatively about the presence of this motive. Except for the Kadin Aga Mosque, none of the sites is active as a religious facility, so they cannot revive the past. The final factor was related to the possibilities to promote the Ottoman heritage landmarks as tourist attractions and hence to reanimate them. Once again, we were unable to make clear conclusion due to divided opinions. To be exact, 44% agreed and 23% partially agreed that all landmarks may attract interest to be visited, but not all of them may be explored in cultural manner. Opposite to this, 33% of the interviewees thought that the current landmarks should be promoted only as landmarks with historical values and archaic elements that make them authentic. Thus, there are no possibilities to perform some cultural events that may attract visitors.

CONCLUSION

The research intended to identify approaches to transform OHS into tourism points of interest according to the perception of the stakeholders. From four investigated motives, the deliberate decision for tourism development based on history, along with the economic benefits are identified as the most prevalent factors that may support cultural tourism development in Štip. It was found that by reanimating the OHS, cultural tourism may be developed as a generator of economic growth not only in Štip, but in the wider East region of Macedonia.

The field research revealed that Štip offers uncoordinated tourism supply and needs creation of specific tailor-made tourism product. The process of creating such product should take into consideration the needs of the traveler, visitor or the tourist, along with the expectations and motivation, which must be included in a tourist route. Such thematic route that will offer exploration of the OHS may be a solid base and opportunity to expand tourism development, particularly in time of ever growing tourism demand for such a modern form of non-stationary type of visit. This kind of route requests mapping of the OHS on local, regional and national tourist maps as a precondition for developing and promoting tourist routes that will discover Ottoman history. By all means, the route may be expanded with other points of interest from Štip, like the Museum of the town Štip whereas the exhibition from the Ottoman period is presented, or a short walk to the Štip Fortress known as Isar dating from the early middle ages, and simultaneously to taste Turkish meals and desserts.

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